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SUBJECT: RIGA 2008 ANNUAL OVERSEAS SECURITY ADVISORY COUNCIL (OSAC)
CRIME AND SAFETY REPORT

REF: A) 08 STATE 132056

11. Overall Crime/Safety Situation: Latvia continues to be a relatively safe country, compared to a U.S. city of similar size. Crimes of opportunity, including pickpockets, theft from automobiles, and some residential thefts mainly occur in the larger cities with the majority of occurrences in Riga. Violent crime is still present, including assaults and in some extreme cases homicide. Other violent assaults have involved young intoxicated males in public parks or in the Old Town. In addition, an illicit drug culture is growing, resulting in increased theft crimes to support the drug habit. The organized crime community remains active, with operations expanding into credit card fraud, bank card fraud and extortion. As the main city Riga becomes more of a tourist destination, the frequency of crimes targeting foreigners has multiplied.

1A. Crime Threats: Riga experienced an alarming trend involving the defrauding and extortion of foreign visitors during 2008. The U.S. Embassy issued two separate Warden Notices warning of these threats and publishing a list of establishments known for extortionate and sometimes violent practices. The physical intimidation of foreign visitors, the large sums of money being extorted and the perceived police acquiescence of the crimes resulted in high level meetings with senior members of Latvian government and the Diplomatic Corps. Incidents have continued to occur through December 2008 with little improvement. Visitors to Latvia generally experience a safe and secure country, and many of the reported crimes could have easily been avoided using common sense practices. The city of Riga is filled with public parks and a boisterous Old Town center. At night, these areas can become dangerous, replete with thieves and intoxicated groups of people. Of the reported crimes against Americans and other foreign visitors, many have occurred in dimly-lit parks or outside of clubs late at night; however, there have been assaults and menacing behavior in broad daylight. In addition, criminals prey on intoxicated victims. In some instances, victims have been drugged while at bars and nightclubs and then robbed. Bank card/ATM fraud has also been reported to the U.S. Embassy. It recommended that foreign visitors use clearly marked cab companies such as Riga Taxi or Riga Taxi Park.

1B. Road Condition and Safety Concerns: Major highways in Latvia are in a generally good state of repair; however conditions frequently change due to the weather. Secondary roads can be treacherous, poorly lit, and without proper signage. Caution is advised at all times, as pedestrians and unsafe drivers are numerous along the roads. Latvia has one of the highest accident rates in all of Europe.

12. Political Violence

1A. Historical Perspective: The threat of political violence in Latvia is extremely rare; however there has been more activity in recent years due to an economic downturn and allegations of corruption in the government. Demonstrations do occur, the majority of which target the government. In November 2007, over 7,000 people assembled to protest alleged corruption in the parliament. The group broke out in song and no untoward incidents occurred. In an unusual occurrence in the first month of 2009, a demonstration

organized in the Old Town of Riga numbering around 10,000 resulted in violent protest. When the rally finished, about 1,000 people tried to storm the parliament building, resulting in damages to buildings and police vehicles, as well as numerous arrests and injuries. U.S. Embassy Riga has not been specifically targeted for demonstration or protest and only is tangentially affected by other protests aimed at government buildings or other foreign missions which share the same street. Anti-American sentiment is minimal.

1B. Regional Terrorism and organized crime: No known indigenous terrorist organizations are present in Latvia. Organized crime is a growing concern. Groups are active in narcotics and prostitution, among other illicit enterprises. In the past few years there have been targeted killings of alleged members of organized crime groups. Collateral casualties have not been reported.

1C. International Terrorism or Transnational Terrorism: With Latvia's recent inclusion in the Schengen regime, the ease with which an international terrorist group could enter Latvia has increased; however, the threat is consistent with most of the rest of Western Europe. Latvia's vigorous support of coalition efforts in the Middle East and South Asia give it a higher profile and the increased vulnerability of attracting the attention of international terrorist groups.

1D. Civil Unrest: There have been no significant incidents of civil unrest in recent history.

13. Post Specific Concerns

1A. Earthquakes and Floods: N/A

1B. Industrial and Transportation Accidents: No significant industrial accidents have occurred; however the Ignalina Nuclear Plant, leftover from the Soviet era and located just across the Lithuanian border 150 km from Riga, would significantly impact the city in the event of a meltdown. It contains reactors similar to those of the Chernobyl plant. It is scheduled to be dismantled in 2009 as part of EU regulation.

1C. Kidnappings: There have been no incidents of targeted kidnappings of any individuals in Latvia.

1D. Drugs and Narcoterrorism: The illicit drug trade has become more robust in the past few years, with entry points on the sea and through land border crossings. Latvian border agencies have made some considerable headway, but the amount entering and/or transiting to Russia is estimated to be growing. Cocaine, heroine and synthetic drugs are the most frequently seized drugs. Drug cartels routinely use Baltic banks for money laundering operations. Latvia officials are working closely with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency on curbing the flow of illegal narcotics into and through Latvia.

14. Police Response: Latvia's police force has been making strides to improve in a variety of areas. Senior Latvian officers have taken advantage of training opportunities abroad in areas of community policing and racial sensitivity. Municipal police officers are becoming more high-profile and prolific throughout the public parks and in the Old Town. Education at the patrol level still remains problematic. Notifications to diplomatic entities when their respective citizens have been arrested continue to be neglected by the police. There have also been serious allegations of corruption on a small and in some cases, a larger scale. The Corruption Prevention Bureau has aggressively prosecuted those who are involved in bribery or other corruption schemes. Specific incidences of non-responsiveness by the police to assault or racial harassment cases continue to be reported to the Embassy.

1A. How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment: While unlikely, in the event that a foreigner is detained or harassed by the police, the individual should comply with police instructions. However, a request for an interpreter and the individual's respective embassy should be made immediately.

1B. Where to Turn for Assistance If One Becomes a Victim of a Crime: For any emergency, one should dial "112". The police can be directly dialed at "02". English speaking operators are available

at those numbers. If an American is detained, he or she should contact the U.S. Embassy in Riga at the 24-hour number: +371-6703-6200.

15. Medical Emergencies: How to Get Medical Assistance in an Emergency

1A. For medical emergencies, one can dial "112" or "03" for a medical professional directly. While medical facilities are improving, recent negative experiences by U.S. staff have indicated that more resources are needed to improve health care in Latvia. Foreigners are advised to maintain private health insurance and medivac insurance as well.

1B. Air Ambulance Services: Latvia maintains one facility with a helicopter for catastrophic emergencies. It is called the Centre of Emergency and Disaster Medicine and can be reached by phone at +371-761-5534.

16. Travel Precautions: Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

1A. As mentioned above, common sense should dictate a foreigner's time in Latvia. Avoid dimly-lit parks and streets at night. If possible, travel in a group. Stay alert when navigating the streets as a pedestrian or a driver. It is a good idea to secure all valuables in the home, in the car and on the person. Vehicles should be parked in well-lit or visible areas.

1B. Crimes/Scams unique to Latvia: Identity theft is reportedly on the rise in Latvia. It is advisable to remain cautious when using ATM's on the street, as well as maintaining all credit card receipts. Care should be taken when using bank machines (ATM's), especially in Old Town. Avoid dimly lit or remote locations when using the machines.

In many of the night clubs, there is a scam where a foreigner will buy a drink and then be presented with an exorbitant bill based on a separate menu. He or she will then be detained until the bill is paid, sometimes through physical intimidation. Although calling the police is encouraged, they seldom intervene in these disputes. It is best to avoid these places or else agree to the price before ordering. Racially motivated and alternative lifestyle harassment and assaults have occurred within the last year and continue to be of great concern to U.S. Embassy Riga. Crimes of this nature should be immediately reported to the foreign visitor's embassy and the police.

1C. Areas to Avoid/Best Security Practices: The area immediately to the east of the train station, the so-called "Moscow" section of town, is to be avoided. Much of the drug activity takes place there even in the daytime. The market area and the Old Town are popular with pickpockets. Care should be taken with regard to wallets and purses in those areas. Merkala Street, between Barona and Caka streets across from the train station, should be avoided due to a variety of illicit activities.

17. Further Information: How to Contact the Embassy

The Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Riga can be reached at +371-6703-6214. For any other concerns, including American Citizen Services, contact the 24-hour main number at +371-6703-6200. Other information about Embassy Riga can be found by visiting our website at www.usembassy.lv/.

18. OSAC Country Council: Contact the Jerry Worth at the American Chamber of Commerce at +371 721 2204 or by email at amcham@amcham.lv. For further information, consult the American Chamber of Commerce in Latvia website at <http://www.amcham.lv/>.

19. U.S. Companies are encouraged to contact Regional Security Officer Jeff Lefler for any security related matters at +371-6703-6214 or by email at LeflerJS@state.gov.

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